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NAU aids U.S. Energy, State de

Stories by J

Established in 1949, the Seversk nuclear complex located in western Siberia promised abundant and cheap energy. Its two massive reactors would also provide the emerging Soviet superpower a rich supply of plutonium, which would eventually be used to fuel the nuclear bombs that safeguarded the country against the budding American arsenal.

Today, after many agreements between the two superpowers were effected, these plants – along with another plutonium producing unit in nearby Zheleznogorsk – still exist. And they still produce the same plutonium as before. But without arms production, they are regarded as proliferation and nuclear waste hazards.

RUSSIA

Mothballing these reactors is not as easy as it seems, as they provide necessary heat, energy, and employment for local citizens. However, through the help of the Corps of Engineers, a transition plan called the Elimination of Weapons Grade Plutonium Production Program (EWGPP) has been engaged.

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration signed an agreement with the Russian Federal Agency for Atomic Energy in March 2003 that stated the following exchange: Russia would permanently shut down these remaining nuclear reactors if the United States helped construct and replace alternative energy plants in these areas, thus halting plutonium production while ensuring the regional heat and electricity requirements were safely met.

The Corps was selected by the DOE as an independent source to assess the progress of this agreement, ensuring that all parties in the pact hold up their ends of the deal.

"Because of the magnitude of the agreement, the contract had to be written very precisely and with many milestones such as cost and schedule deadlines," said Bill Thievon, Europe District contract administrator.

"As such, our independent review in Moscow helped both the U.S. and the Russian sides determine the contract's progress and performance."

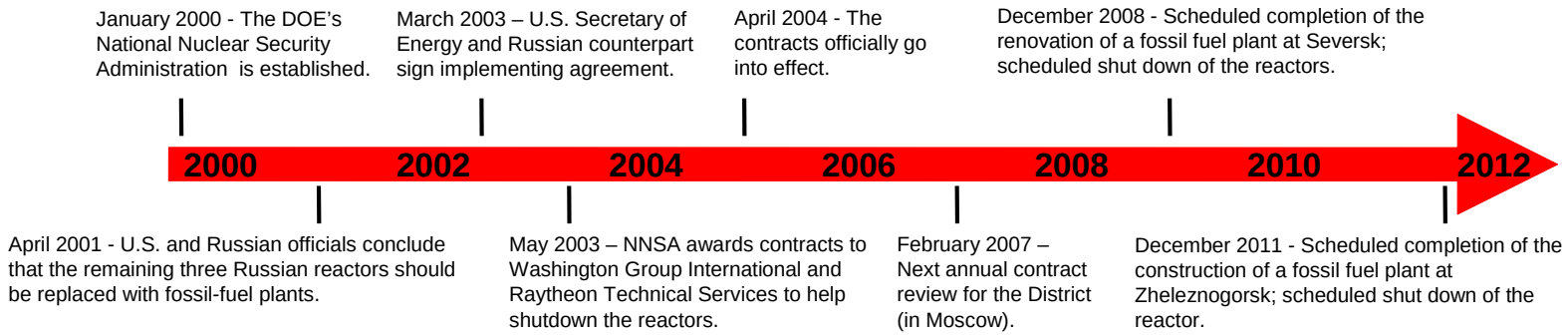
Thievon and five other USACE employees were called to Moscow last February to help evaluate the EWGPP contract, currently administered by the U.S.-based Washington Group International and Raytheon Technical Services. There, they sought to identify management deficiencies and ensure reactor shutdown is proceeding concurrently with the construction and refurbishment of the new plants.

In the end, the EWGPP program seeks a Seversk closure by 2008 and a Zheleznogorsk closure by 2011. But the EWGPP program is just one facet of the District's relationship with the DOE, said Wayne Uhl, a District program manager for International Engineering.

"We basically do whatever the DOE needs us to do," said Wayne Uhl, a District program manager for International Engineering. In fact, the District is already in the process of hiring a full-time employee to work on DOE projects in Russia, Uhl said.

At this point, however, Thievon and crew are scheduled to head back to Moscow in February to conduct follow-up assessments and endure the inhospitable cold.

"I'll be glad to go back next winter and be a part of something so historic, despite the bad weather," said Thievon.



on in the east

epartments in regional security

Justin Ward

The Republic of Georgia's 2003 bloodless coup, the "Rose Revolution," declared war against corruption. A new president was elected. New governmental reforms were launched and several policemen and high-ranking officials were arrested and tried for aiding and abetting organized drug and alcohol smuggling circuits.

It was the dawn of a new era for Georgia.

"The Georgian government has made great strides in the areas of police reform and forensic investigations," said Chris Panico, the narcotics affairs section chief for the U.S. Embassy in Georgia.

And with the help of the United States and allying nations, a new Georgian police force was formed that now consistently ranks high in public opinion polls as one of the most trusted government institutions, Panico said.

GEORGIA

To continue the crime fighting efforts, the Department of State's (DOS) Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) program has engaged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Europe District, to award a contract to help the Georgian government establish enduring security measures.

"It's one contract but two projects," said Wayne Uhl, a District program manager for International Engineering. One is the construction of a new police academy, and the other is a renovation of a building that will house a new forensics laboratory. Both facilities will be in the capital of Tbilisi.

"These two facilities will greatly enhance the governments' ability to meet head on the needs of an emerging democratic society," Panico said.

The three-story international law enforcement academy will be one of many DOS-funded police academies throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa. Under U.S. direction, these facilities seek to cooperate in combating organized crime, harmonizing international law enforcement activities, and building linkages between U.S. law enforcement entities and future criminal justice leadership.

This new academy "will be built from the ground up," said Uhl. "Not only will it have classrooms … but it also will have some billeting [including] bedrooms and showers." Ultimately, it will be able to house up to 128 recruits.

The forensics lab will help with the technical side of law enforcement, Uhl said.

"It's a nine-story building and we're not quite going to gut it, but it'll be pretty close," said Uhl. "We're going to remove all the exterior stucco and replace that. We'll replace the roof … It's going to receive a new heating and ventilation system. It's going to receive electrical distribution. New finishes, new doors, walls, ceilings, paint, floors. Like a total renovation."

The work will provide laboratory space for petroleum testing, ballistics, automated fingerprint filing, proper evidence control and storage, and a DNA facility, Panico said.

The expected end state is an effective and sustainable forensics lab that will help the Georgians apply modern scientific principles to criminal investigations and prosecutions.

"The refurbishment will allow the Forensic Bureau to finally establish itself as the primary crime lab in the country," added Panico.

As time goes on, other countries in the region will also become better equipped, better trained, and better coordinated with one another, noted the DOS's INL Web site.

With better law enforcement facilities in place, the still-nascent policing forces of this nation will one day be steady enough to properly prosecute the destabilizing criminal activities in the region.

Only then can new democracies like this one claim that their checkered past is truly a part of history.